

Issues and Men Come Laugh at California

THE funniest comedy in the world is now being played in the great state of California, and it's all the funnier because so many who are taking part in it are in such deadly earnest. "Our readers will remember" that last summer and fall a wicked man known as Upton Sinclair convulsed California because he dared to propose that poverty was an anachronism in so rich and beautiful a state, and urged a plan which he thought, and thinks, will end it. Thereupon all the well-to-do people in California and the entire press of the state went into spasms of horror. Chief among them was an estimable weekly paper in San Francisco, the *Argonaut*. It fairly frothed at the mouth. "California," it wrote, "is not a laboratory in which the well-being of 6,000,000 human beings can be tampered with for the pleasure of giddy amateurs of government, theorists who are anxious to wreck the work of nearly a century simply because they believe their way is the only way to deal with an emergency." It admitted that a lot of people were out of work and that this condition was man-made. "Mistakes, errors, and lack of vision—not only here but throughout the world—caused the condition," it confessed, "but it will not be cured by adding catastrophe to mistake." And on another occasion it said, "California has known crises, but never one like this. . . . The enemy is within, parading in familiar and formerly honorable raiment, breathing milk-and-honey promises to beguile the gullible to destruction." Fortunately the man of the hour was at hand. Governor Merriam, governor by accident, who was in office as a result of the death of his predecessor, was the very man California needed to stave off chaos, ruin, and bolshevism. "The catastrophe of Sinclair's election," the *Argonaut* opined, "would be drastic enough to overthrow all that is fine and good and stable in California life. In Merriam the people of California have a promise and a symbol of strength, progress, and stability of traditional growth—in Sinclair a promise and a symbol of ruin."

Well, the forces of righteousness triumphed, the symbol of strength, progress, and stability took office—and lo and behold, it is not righteousness but wickedness that rules in Sacramento now. Listen to the *Argonaut* today: "Would Upton Sinclair have done worse in the gubernatorial chair than the man who defeated him? It may well be doubted. He might even have done better, for he has an atom or two of genius in his composition while all one can discern in Merriam is *cobwebs from an empty skull!*" It appears that this ex-hero is playing politics, and rotten politics; he is imitating Nero in his use of the violin. The prosperity, yes, "even the safety of California is trembling in the balance today." Incredible as it seems, he has put the Townsend old-age plan before everything else, and if the *Argonaut* is to be trusted, he has listened to those who talk of him as a future Presidential candidate. But that is not the worst. Governor Merriam is proposing a state income-tax law. Citing Charles G. Norris and his wife as an example, the *Argonaut* declares that these distinguished

authors are paying about 52 per cent of their income now to the federal government, and that if Governor Merriam's income tax becomes law they will pay an additional 18 per cent, or 70 cents out of every dollar; and that, as the *Argonaut* remarks, "would be coming pretty close to communism." The people of California voted, it appears, for Merriam in order to avoid confiscation, which is merely another name for communism, and now, you see, they have jumped from the frying pan into the fire.

The trouble is that at bottom the Governor is "a moral bolshevik" because he was a prohibitionist, a fact that the press of California failed to bring out last fall, and a fellow who is a moral bolshevik is so close to being the real thing that it is only a step to the full-fledged article. The *Argonaut* shrieks in its anguish: "Heaven help us before we perish from the folly of having chosen such a man as governor." Where, it asks, oh, where is the Governor Merriam who during the campaign was going to move heaven and earth to "pull California from the abyss of deficits and confiscatory taxation"? What the San Francisco *Chronicle* cannot stomach is that Governor Merriam is a natural ally of Huey Long. It noted that the legislature considered asking Huey Long to address it, and it suggested that Governor Merriam "preside at the meeting and present his fellow-exponent of the doctrine that twice two is fifty-seven. Birds of this particular feather in common should flock together for once, no matter how much the remainder of their plumage may differ." Plainly, if Governor Merriam keeps up these wicked tactics, California may yet beg Upton Sinclair to run for governor again.

And what are we to say of the fact that the Assembly has unanimously passed a bill for a production-for-use program! Yes, just think of it—the very thing for advocating which Upton Sinclair was denounced as a Communist, a destroyer, public enemy No. 1. It is a self-help cooperative measure sponsored by the Sinclair Democrats to foster and develop cooperative organizations for the unemployed. Those bulwarks of safety and sanity, the possessing classes and the embattled editors of California, must indeed be overcome with horror. Here is treason in their own ranks. Nothing but the facts that the legislature is considering a lot of anti-red bills—one of which has elicited a protest from eighteen professors at the University of California because it makes it a felony to possess or transport revolutionary literature—that a twenty-year-old girl student has been sentenced to twenty-five days in prison for distributing hand-bills demanding peace, and that after nineteen years Tom Mooney is still in jail can preserve one's faith in the glorious state of California. But I tremble for the future. Shall we see a soviet elected in California before June 15?

Bruce Garrison Villard